









CHRISTIAN CHARITY AND THE
ATHANASIAN CREED.

A

LETTER TO A FRIEND,

BY

A LAYMAN.



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A Letter on the Athanasian Creed.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You tell me that, while you firmly believe the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you yet shrink when you hear in church the clauses of the Athanasian Creed which, as you suppose, declare that all who will not subscribe or who have not subscribed to that formula shall perish everlastingly. You therefore wish to see some change made either in the use or in the form of the Creed.

The Eighth Article of the Church of England, which every clergyman must repeatedly subscribe before he receives the cure of souls, declares that the three Creeds ought to be thoroughly received and believed. Therefore, no clergyman, who must necessarily subscribe this Article, and no layman who desires to accept the full teaching of the Church of England, would be relieved from the duty of believing the Creed by any alteration as to the time or mode of its use.

But then you say, Why cannot the “damnatory clauses,” which grate upon my ears and offend my sense of Christian charity, be omitted?

Now it is plainly contrary to Christian charity that teachers of religion should shun to declare the whole counsel of God. I ask you, then, are the warnings contained in the “damnatory clauses” part

of the whole counsel of God, or not? for if so, your objections will of course cease. I shall further proceed to lay before you some considerations which may induce you to see that the solemn warnings of the Creed are really part of the Christian religion; and as man may not choose for himself this or that part of revelation, so as to deny or abandon the remainder, so true Christian wisdom and charity require our Church to set forth the warnings no less than the comfortable promises of Christianity.

I. And, firstly, let me point out to you that the Creed begins by addressing those who desire to be saved, *Quicumque vult salvus esse*, i.e. "Whosoever has the will to be saved," or as our Prayer-book translates it, "Whosoever will be saved:" not, that is, that none will be saved who have not always held this faith, but "if any man desires to be saved." Just as in the Acts of the Apostles (xvi. 30, 31) the keeper of the prison asks St. Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" St. Paul replies, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and the Church, giving the same reply but in different words, says, "It is necessary to hold the Catholick Faith." The Church then proceeds to unfold the nature of God and the scheme of redemption, for "he that cometh to God must believe that He is." Inasmuch, then, as Almighty God *is*, that is to say, existed and exists from all eternity, before man could think of or know Him, His nature and attributes are eternally independent of man's conception; but He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, and the Church has gathered up the revelation of Himself which He has thus con-

descended to make, and this is called "the Catholick Faith."

You thus see that the Athanasian Creed is addressed to Christians who desire to be safe in the knowledge of God. Would not, then, the Church fail in her duty to immortal souls, if she were to shrink from bringing out of her treasure-house the full stores of heavenly wisdom entrusted to her by the providence of God?

II. I will, secondly, place before you in simple language some elementary propositions which I think will scarcely be denied by thoughtful Christians.

1. Mankind was created for the glory of Almighty God.

2. The state of man on earth is one of preparation for his final end.

3. Man cannot attain his final end of perfectly glorifying Almighty God without a perfect knowledge of Him.

4. It has therefore pleased Almighty God to reveal to mankind the knowledge of Himself through the Christian dispensation, which alone can make man wise unto salvation.

5. While it is not necessary, during the state of probation, that each Christian should explicitly comprehend in detail the high doctrines of revealed truth, yet if his belief, so far as it goes, be not in accordance with them, he so far incurs spiritual loss.

6. To think of Almighty God in a manner contrary to the revelation of Himself in the Christian

dispensation, is incompatible with the state of final salvation, which is the perfect seeing and knowing Almighty God as He is.

7. As God's promises are held out to those only who comply with the gracious conditions of the new covenant (for there is none other name save that of Jesus whereby we may be saved), so the warnings of revelation are for those only who, after opportunity given, resist and refuse the knowledge of the Christian dispensation.

If then, my dear friend, these simple statements be true (and there are few who, holding like yourself the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, will gainsay them), is it really Christian charity to withhold the declaration of the truths they contain ?

Read over again these statements, and see if they grate upon your sense of Christian charity ; and if not, where is the difference between them and the warnings of the Athanasian Creed ?

How shall Christians believe the truth as it is in Jesus, if the Church shrinks from putting together for her children the conditions of that Christian dispensation which tells of Him both as Man and as God ?

The Athanasian Creed teaches us of Him as Man in respect of His Incarnation : it teaches us of Him as God in His eternal relation with the other Persons of the Holy Trinity. It tells us of blessings to be won ; it warns us of dangers to be guarded against. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord Jesus shall be saved : " so says

St. Paul. But then the Apostle continues : “ How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed ? ” and still more pertinently, “ How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard ? ”

The Creed of S. Athanasius gathers up from Holy Scripture what we are to “ hear ” about Him who is our God. If, then, these truths have been revealed, it is necessary for us to believe them : and if it is necessary for us to believe them, is it true Christian charity not to endeavour to bring home to others the sense of the vast spiritual loss incurred by them, if, after opportunity given, they refuse to accept the teaching of God’s holy Word, as to the nature and work of God, in a matter which lies at the very root of spiritual life ?

I remain,

Your faithful friend,

B.

To the Venerable the Prolocutor and the Reverend the Clergy of the Province of Canterbury in Convocation assembled.

Or if the Convocation of York—

To His Grace the President, their Lordships the Bishops, the Very Reverend the Prolocutor, and the Reverend the Clergy of the Province of York in Convocation assembled.

THE humble Petition of the undersigned Communicants of the Church of England [“ Rector, Vicar, or Minister (as the case may be), Churchwardens and Parishioners ” of such a place, or as the “ inhabitants ” of such a town or parish] sheweth, that your Petitioners being persuaded that the Doctrines of the Holy Trinity, of the Incar-

nation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, of Eternal Punishment, and of the necessity of accepting God's revelation of Himself in the Christian dispensation ought thoroughly to be received and believed by all Christians, "for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture," and being further of opinion that the controversies of the present day require members of the Church to be duly reminded of these truths as set forth in the Confession of our Christian faith commonly called the Creed of S. Athanasius, and moreover feeling that the Synods of Canterbury and York have no right to cancel, remove, or alter any of the Three Creeds of the Church, and that grave danger would attend an attempt to vary the use of the same without the co-operation and consent of the whole Anglican Communion, earnestly pray you to maintain the said Creed in its integrity, and not to consent to any proposal for its disuse.

And your Petitioners will ever pray, &c.

Please to follow these Instructions carefully, or the Petition may be useless :—

- I. Every Petition should be written on one side of a sheet of foolscap paper, not printed or lithographed, and should have at least one signature on the same page as the writing.
- II. Signatures must be written on one side only of the sheet, and by the Petitioners themselves.
- III. When more sheets than one are needed for signatures, other sheets may be pasted on.
- IV. Petitions may be signed by women as well as men.
- V. Petitions must be sent in not later than April 20, and may be trusted to your Proctor in Convocation.



